



## **Things Fall Apart – Reading Guide**

**Setting:** Umuofia and neighboring Mbanta, Nigeria, late 1800s

### **Okonkwo**

Okonkwo's father: **Unoka**

Okonkwo's three wives: **Nwoye's mother**

**Ekwefi**

**Ojiugo**

Okonkwo's children: **Nwoye**

**Ezinma**

Okonkwo's foster son: **Ikemefuna**

**Obierika**

**Ezeudu**

**Chielo**

**Uchendu**

**Mr. Kiaga**

**Mr. Brown**

**Mr. Smith**

**Enoch**

**District Commissioner**

### **Part 1: Umuofia**

*This section develops life pre-Western contact. The exposition (background information) is emphasized so outsiders can better understand expectations of Okonkwo's society.*

**Chapter 1:** How do community attitudes toward Unoka and Okonkwo differ?

**Chapter 2:** What do we learn about the culture's systems of conflict resolution through their response to the murder of a daughter of Umuofia?

**Chapter 3:** Describe Unoka and Okonkwo's relationship. How does it shape Okonkwo's personality?

**Chapter 4:** What are attitudes toward women? What is the function of Week of Peace?

**Chapter 5:** What is the function of Feast of the New Yam? How does Okonkwo differ in his attitude toward his three wives?

**Chapter 6:** What is the function of the wrestling contest?

**Chapter 7:** What are Nwoye's attitudes toward his father and masculine expectations? What do we learn about Okonkwo's characterization during the sacrifice of Ikemefuna?

**Chapter 8:** What purpose does Obierika's character have in the development of the story? What are customs surrounding marriage?

**Chapter 9:** How does the episode of Enzinma and the *iyi-uwa* (stone forming link between an *ogbanje* and the spirit world) help reveal cultural beliefs?

**Chapter 10:** How does the assembly of nine *egwugwu* to judge dispute between Uzowulu and Odukwe over Uzowulu's wife, Mgbafo demonstrate conflict resolution?

**Chapter 11:** How does the scene of Enzinma taken by Chielo to the Sacred Cave of Agbala contribute to understanding of the characters or culture?

**Chapter 12:** How does the engagement of Obierika's daughter reveal culture?

**Chapter 13:** What significant event mars the funeral of Ezeudu?

**PART 1:** What are Okonkwo's conflicts? (person v self, p v person, p v society)

**PART 1:** What are examples of conflicts or disagreements from within the tribe that threaten the health or the community and/or observance of customs?

---

**Part 2: Mbanta**

*Now that we understand Igbo customs, the primary conflicts emerge and the plot becomes clearer.*

**Chapter 14:** What is Okonkwo's primary person vs. self conflict?

What does Uchendu try to teach him about this new position in the motherland?

**Chapter 15:** What news does Obierika bring from Umofia?

What new conflict does this news introduce?

**Chapter 16:** What is a positive impact of the missionaries' arrival in Mbanta?

What is a negative impact of the missionaries' arrival in Mbanta?

**Chapter 17:** Trace the events that lead to an increase of power by the missionaries.

**Chapter 18:** What strategies does Mr. Kiaga use to increase his parishioners?

**Chapter 19:** What hopes did Okonkwo have for the end of his exile period? How many of those hopes have been realized?

What does he anticipate for his return to Umuofia?

**PART 2:** What are events within the Ibo that help to break the group into different parts?

**PART 2:** How is Okonkwo's character revealed by the change in setting to Mbanta?

---

### ***Part 3: Umuofia***

*Now that he's back in Umuofia, this is Okonkwo's chance to take a leadership role in the changes thrust upon his Fatherland.*

**Chapter 20:** Consider the writer's craft in making this setting change (first removing Okonkwo from Umuofia, then returning him there): what is the main purpose for this shift?

**Chapter 21:** How does Mr. Brown see his role in the community?

**Chapter 22:** Describe the personality of Mr. Smith, especially as compared to Mr. Brown. What is the point in having two missionaries with such different personalities in this order?

What is unique about Enoch's crime? What does this signal for this culture?

**Chapter 23:** How does the District Commissioner settle conflict? How fair is this new British-imposed government?

**Chapter 24:** Consider the many ways Okonkwo is in conflict at this point in the novel (person vs. self, person, society). Compare your feelings toward him now to those at the beginning of the novel.

three techniques I could write about.

1.

**Chapter 25:** Read this chapter carefully (at least two times). What literary tools did Achebe use when writing this chapter differently than the preceding chapters? What is their effect?

3.

Which one should be first? Second? Third?

**ANALYSIS ESSAY:**

*Things Fall Apart* tells both a personal and public tragedy: the personal tragedy of Okonkwo as well as the public one of the larger Igbo culture.

**How does Chinua Achebe use literary techniques to create the tragic vision of the novel?**

characterization  
diction  
setting  
narrative pace  
use of conflict  
dramatic structure  
irony  
point of view  
foreshadowing  
symbolism  
choice of detail  
use of title/epigraph



**Original Thinking:**

- Formulates a thesis in response to prompt, utilizing specific subpoints
- Analyzes the works in a significant, not superficial, way and avoids unnecessary plot summary

**Support, Details, and Evidence:**

- Uses sufficient supporting examples and/or well-selected passages from text to support thesis and ideas
- Uses correct parenthetical citations and includes MLA-formatted works-cited entry

**Organization and Clarity:**

- Demonstrates structural unity (intro/body/conclusion, topic sentences, transitions)
- Demonstrates grammatical and mechanical accuracy; errors do not obscure meaning

**Grading:**

A	Work surpasses some/all criteria, shows superior thoughtfulness
B	Work capably meets all criteria
C	Work meets some of the criteria
D/F	Criteria has not been met

## **Things Fall Apart – Vocabulary**

### **PART ONE**

**flourish** (verb) – to be strong and healthy or to grow well

**stoic** (noun; adj) – one who appears unaffected by emotions; tending to remain unemotional

**accolade** (noun) – public expression of high praise and esteem for somebody

**clout** (noun) – the power to influence things; a blow with the hand or fist

**bolster** (verb) – to strengthen something through support or encouragement

**discord** (noun) – disagreement or strife between people, things or situations

**exacting** (adj) – requiring strict attention to detail, hard work

**atone** (verb) – to make reparation or compensation for a sin or mistake

**inadvertent** (adj) – done unintentionally or without thinking

**censure** (noun) – severe criticism, official expression of disapproval

### **PART TWO AND THREE**

**harbinger** (noun) – somebody or something that anticipates a future event

**zealot** (noun) – one who shows excessive enthusiasm; a religious extremist

**vie** (verb) – to strive for superiority or compete with someone for something

**undermine** (verb) – to erode the base or foundation, leading to collapse

**cleave** (verb) – to split along a plane of natural weakness

**ensconce** (verb) – to make comfortably established as if to stay a long time

**abomination** (noun) – object of intense disapproval for being immoral, disgusting, shameful

**pacification** (noun) – process of bringing peace by ending conflict (often through use of military force)

**tumult** (noun) – a loud, confused noise, esp. one caused by large mass of people

**impotent** (adj) – without strength or power to do anything effective or helpful